

The AFI FEST Interview: Tributee Annette Bening, Star of 20TH CENTURY WOMEN

Description

Annette Bening has triumphed on both stage and screen since the 1980s. Early in her career, she scored a TonyÂ® nomination for her Broadway debut in COASTAL DISTURBANCES. She has four Academy AwardÂ® nominations to her name, for THE GRIFTERS (1990), AMERICAN BEAUTY (1999), BEING JULIA (2004) and THE KIDS ARE ALL RIGHT (2010), plus an EmmyÂ® nomination in 2006 for MRS. HARRIS.

This year, AFI FEST highlights her role as a single mother in 1979 Santa Barbara in Mike Millsâ?? 20TH CENTURY WOMEN â?? one of her best performances yet. As Dorothea, Bening is a force of nature, channeling a smart, resourceful woman who anchors a rambling bohemian house with a slew of perfectly era-specific itinerants. Additionally, in RULES DONâ??T APPLY, the festivalâ??s Opening Night Gala directed by and starring Beningâ??s husband Warren Beatty, she brings her sparkling charisma to a crucial supporting role.

AFI spoke with Bening about her films in the festival.

AFI: What initially attracted you to the character of Dorothea, and how did you join the project of 20TH CENTURY WOMEN?

Annette Bening: Mike Mills called and asked me to read the screenplay; we then met and had dinner. We talked extensively about his ideas, his mom and the character of Dorothea. Shortly after that he asked me to play Dorothea, and weâ??ve been talking about her ever since.

AFI: The film has an excellent and varied supporting cast, all of whom orbit around Dorothea in different ways. Can you talk about what it was like working with Greta Gerwig, Billy Crudup, Elle Fanning and Lucas Jade Zumann?



AB: We were a tight and loving ensemble, thanks to Mike Mills putting us together in rehearsal in immediate and imaginative ways. We danced, improvâ??d, did specific acting exercises and got to know each other. It was challenging and penetrative work, where we searched ourselves and each other to find the hearts of the characters. Hopefully that shows on the screen.

AFI: Does Mike Millsâ?? vision of 1979 resonate with your experience of it?

AB: I was 19 in 1979, and for me, Mike is contextualizing that time in his own unique way.

AFI: One of the many great things about 20TH CENTURY WOMEN is how it grapples with the idea of confusing and contradictory expectations about femininity and masculinity. As an actress, was it exciting to tackle this?

AB: In rehearsal and preparation, intellectual ideas are naturally at play. In performance, these ideas become nascent for me, and Iâ??m trying to listen, respond and be in the immediate moment with my fellow actors.

AFI: You have a supporting role in the festivalâ??s Opening Night Gala, RULES DONâ??T APPLY, written and directed by and starring your husband, Warren Beatty. Do you two have a collaborative relationship when working together on set?

AB: Working on RULES DONâ??T APPLY with my husband was for me a dream come true. Heâ??s a great director, enjoying his actors with zeal and humor. Heâ??s demanding and exacting in the best way and even let me improvise a little, and thatâ??s my favorite thing.

20TH CENTURY WOMEN screens on Wednesday, November 16, as a Gala Tribute; RULES DONâ??T APPLY screens on Thursday, November 10, as the Opening Night Gala.

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